



# **FLEAS AND YOUR PET**

## **FACT SHEET 11**

### **THE FLEA PROBLEM**

The flea is a small, wingless, bloodsucking insect which is more than familiar to most pet owners. *Ctenocephalides felis* is the cat flea which can also infect dogs, rodents, primates and in some rare cases, humans. *Ctenocephalides canis* is the dog and fox flea. Other species of the flea affect hedgehogs, rabbits, hares, horses, mice, rats and man. Fleas and the associated skin conditions are a major problem.

### **THE FLEA LIFE-CYCLE**

Adult fleas will live on your pet and can lay up to five hundred eggs during their lifetime. These fall from the host animal to the ground and then hatch into tiny maggot-like larvae. Over a period of one or two weeks, the larvae spin cocoons in which pupae start to develop. The pupal stage of the flea's life cycle is very resistant and has been known to survive in the environment for several months. When conditions are favourable, the pupa hatches into an adult flea, finds a host to feed from and then the cycle begins again. The total life-cycle of the flea varies tremendously from ten days to eight months, depending on the temperature of the environment.

### **HOW TO TELL IF YOUR CAT OR DOG HAS FLEAS**

You may find it quite difficult to find any live fleas on your pet, but other signs will be apparent. Check for scratching, chewing and licking and other signs of irritation, including, hair loss, dermatitis and hot spots, particularly around the tail area. Look for flea droppings (known as flea dirt), which are dry, black and slightly gritty, by checking through the coat. Brush a few of these onto dampened white paper to see if they leave a blood coloured stain when smudged.

### **FLEA RELATED PROBLEMS**

Each time a flea feeds, its mouthparts expel a small amount of an anti-coagulant type material into the skin of your animal. This helps to prevent the blood from clotting while the flea feeds but can cause an allergic reaction in the skin of some dogs and cats. An animal suffering from flea allergy dermatitis will itch and scratch and may become acutely uncomfortable, chewing patches of its skin raw in a matter of hours. It is essential that veterinary treatment is sought quickly to relieve the irritation if very severe. If your pet is prone to this condition, check the coat regularly for any signs of fleas.

## **DEALING WITH FLEAS**

A healthy animal grooms its coat actively and thoroughly, removing fleas with its incisor teeth. A healthy animal is also naturally more resistant to fleas. To encourage this process, a good diet is essential, especially since this is one of the most important factors in maintaining good health. Try to feed a diet that is free from additives and based on high quality natural ingredients.

- All Denes cat and dog recipes are free from artificial additives and based on good quality natural ingredients.

## **COPING WITH FLEA PROBLEMS**

To deal with fleas successfully you will need to treat both the environment and your dog or cat. You can also use some of Denes herbal remedies and supplements to help deal with some of the problems that fleas cause, as well as to deter fleas from living on your animal.

### **• Dealing with the environment**

You will need to try and break the flea's life-cycle by destroying the egg and the pupal stages. Areas which your pet frequents must be scrupulously cleaned. Vacuuming and sweeping are the best methods, but remember the areas that can easily be missed, such as under chairs, on top of cupboards, around skirting boards and where the animal usually sleeps. Certain herbs are repellent to fleas because of their odour. Leaves and flowers from the following plants can be dried and scattered in the animal's environment, helping to keep fleas away:

- Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*)
- Southernwood (*Artemisia abrotanum*)
- Camphor plant (*Blasamita vulgaris*)
- Lavender (*Lavendula officinalis*)
- Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)
- Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)

### **• Removing infestation from the animal**

Grooming the coat is the first step. Remove all dead hair and tangles; if necessary this should be carried out thoroughly by a professional groomer. A fine flea comb is useful as part of the treatment; you should be able to find one of these in a good pet shop or grooming parlour. When the coat is clear of tangles, gently run the flea comb through the coat, capturing any fleas in the teeth of the comb. Wash the comb in soapy water to trap and remove the fleas.

### **• Preventing re-infestation.**

Denes have a number of products that can help deter fleas from living on your dog or cat.

### **• Denes Liquid Garlic Spray**

This is a good deterrent and can be sprayed directly onto the coat or applied by dipping a flea comb in the solution and running it through the hair. Wash the comb in soapy water to trap and kill the fleas.

- **Denes Garlic Tablets**

Garlic is useful for preventing flea infestation, as well as deterring other parasites. Although you should not be able to detect the odour, the volatile oil in garlic is excreted through the skin, deterring fleas from jumping and living on your animal.

- **Denes Essential Oil Shampoo**

This contains Seaweed and Birch extracts, as well as essential oils of Lavender and Cedarwood. Regular use will help repel fleas and improve the general condition of the coat.

### **Easing the symptoms**

Flea allergy reactions cause itching and scratching linked with other changes in the skin. Areas of red, inflamed skin are common, with scabs or sores, together with hair loss and flaking. The following Denes products can help to ease the symptoms:

### **Herbal Remedies**

- **Denes Greenleaf Tablets**

Greenleaf, which is based on stinging nettles, will help ease the irritation associated with flea related eczema and dermatitis. It will also cleanse the skin of toxins. For the best results, it is often a good idea to use this remedy alongside Denes Garlic Tablets.

- **Homeopathic Remedies**

- **Sulphur 30c**

Sulphur is a good general remedy to use in most cases where there is a flea allergy problem. It works especially well where the skin and coat look untidy or dirty or where the condition has made the skin scabby or greasy. Animals which feel hot and which avoid heat often respond best to Sulphur. Many people use homeopathic sulphur as general deterrent against fleas and find that it helps.

- **Rhus tox 30c**

This remedy will help relieve the severe skin irritation and itching associated with flea allergy reactions and can also be used where the skin is bleeding or raw.

- **Arsenicum album 30c**

Ideally Arsenicum should be used where the skin is red and irritated with accompanying dandruff or scaly areas. Animals that usually need this remedy tend to like to be warm and will seek heat at any opportunity.

### **Aromatherapy Products**

- **Denes Evening Primrose Oil Capsules**

This is a good general supplement that can help improve the skin and coat. Evening primrose oil is particularly good in helping resolve the symptoms associated with flea allergy related skin conditions.

- **Denes Hot Itch Lotion**

This aromatherapy product, based on essential oils, can be used to soothe local areas of sore, red and inflamed skin and ease irritation. Apply twice daily by gentle massage.

- **Denes Skin Balm**

This traditional balm contains essential oil of tea tree and can be used to assist the body's natural healing processes where the skin has been damaged by licking and scratching.

If you have any queries concerning your pet's health or feeding problems, you can contact us for free pet care advice by:

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- Emailing us at [info@denes.com](mailto:info@denes.com)
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